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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2120
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3551
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9145
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: RUN-UP TO ELECTION FILLED WITH MAOIST VIOLENCE

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Maoist violence, including bombings throughout the country and within the Kathmandu Valley, continued in the lead-up to the February 8 municipal election. Fear of Maoist violence kept many people indoors on the first two days of the Maoist's February 5-11 national general strike, and caused others to flee to India, despite Maoist claims that the Maoists had "no general policy to take physical action targeting any innocent person, political worker, or election candidate." The government continued to arrest political party members, activists, and journalists. Human rights groups reported the government held more than 800 people under the Public Security Act as of February 6. The Election Commission announced that polling stations would be set up in schools, in spite of a request by the United Nations that schools not be used for the election due to possible Maoist violence that could hurt children or damage the schools. While leaders of several political parties personally condemned the Maoist violence, their respective Parties had not yet condemned the Maoist general strike called to protest the upcoming municipal election, which the Parties are also actively boycotting. End Summary.

Maoist Bombings Continue

2. (C) Leading up to the February 8 municipal election, Maoists continued to terrorize people throughout the country with acts of violence. Maoist bombs injured two dozen people, including ten children, when improvised explosives went off near a bridge in Nepal's second largest city of Biratnagar on February 3. Security forces confirmed that Maoists set off two bombs within the Kathmandu Valley on February 5, and security forces defused another. While there were no injuries in the Maoist bombings in Kathmandu, two Maoists making bombs in a house in Morang in the eastern Terai accidentally killed themselves and the civilian owner of the house on February 4. Also on February 4, Maoists looted and bombed the house of the Assistant Minister for Land Reform in Dang in the far western Terai. The house was

destroyed, but no one was reported injured, as was the case when Maoists bombed the house of the unopposed candidate for deputy mayor in the far-western town of Dhangadhi on February 13. However, a Maoist bomb injured the four-year-old grandson of the deputy-mayor in the eastern city of Itahari on February 4. On February 2, Maoist insurgents fired at the house of a ward chairman who was elected unopposed in Biratnagar, killing a civilian and injuring the ward chairman. Maoists continued to target government buildings, bombing the Banke cooperative office and a bridge outside of Pokhara on February 3.

Maoist Threats Keep Capital Quiet

13. (U) On February 5, the first day of the Maoist-called week-long national general strike to protest the municipal election, the streets of Kathmandu were quiet as shop owners kept their shops closed and operators did not run vehicles for fear of Maoist retribution. February 6 saw a slight uptick in vehicle traffic, but many shops remained closed. On February 4, the government took control of over 375 private vehicles in Kathmandu to force the owners to run the vehicles during the strike. On February 5, the government announced it would provide compensation to vehicle owners if Maoist violence damaged or burned their vehicles during the general strike. (Note: In April 2005, the government made similar compensation promises to vehicle owners. End note.) The Kathmandu Post reported that the strike "paralyzed life" in most district headquarters, with security forces and local administrators forcing some shops to open. Security forces are providing escorts to convoys across the country, as during past Maoist strikes.

Fear of Maoist Violence Compels Some to Flee to India

14. (U) In Jaleswor, in the eastern Terai, newspapers reported that recent Maoist bombings of government buildings in the area had compelled many to flee to India. The Nepali language daily, Nepal Samachapatra, quoted a woman who was heading to the border with her three children as saying, "we don't know what will happen next." She explained that there was a rumor Maoists would attack the town. She also noted that, "on the one hand, if we vote in the election our neighbors belonging to the political parties will be angry...if we don't vote there is a possibility that the security men would come to our home and compel us to vote." She concluded that, "it is better for us to go and live with our relatives in India for some days." According to the Nepali language daily, Annapurna Post, at least 48 families from the Dhangadi municipality in far-western Nepal left their homes fearing further Maoist attacks during the election period. This included local residents who had earlier migrated to India but who had returned to the area during the recent Maoist cease-fire. News agencies reported that officials in several border districts of Nepal and India had agreed to close the international border from Tuesday to Thursday in order to "hold fair and free elections in peaceful environment."

Maoists Reassure OHCHR That They Will Not Target Candidates

15. (U) On February 3, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "welcomed" the February 2 clarification from Maoist spokesperson Mahara, who claimed the Maoists had "no general policy to take physical action targeting any innocent person, political worker, or election candidate." "But we will continue taking action against those who are involved directly or indirectly in supporting the Royal army to commit criminal activities against members of our party," Mahara continued. The OHCHR statement noted, "As the date of the municipal elections approaches, OHCHR-Nepal calls once again on the authorities to respect the right of freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. OHCHR-Nepal also calls on those advocating boycott of the elections to do so peacefully and with respect for the rights

of others, and urges that no coercion should be applied to force people to participate in strikes or other protest actions.⁸ Despite Mahara's statement, the press carried numerous reports of Maoists bombing candidates' homes since February 3.

Government Holds 800 Politicos: Arrests Continue

16. (U) On February 5, the government arrested more than 25 seven-party activists participating in an anti-election rally in Biratnagar and twelve journalists in the eastern Terai town of Rajbiraj involved in a rally calling for the release of detained journalists. OHCHR reported that it was aware of more than 800 people whom the government had detained under the Public Security Act. OHCHR issued a statement calling upon the government to release all the detainees held for peacefully expressing their political opinion. A statement issued by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on February 5, reported that its inspection team found that the government was holding "university teachers, professionals, human rights activists and even street dwellers." NHRC asserted that that police had used "excessive force" while taking some people into custody, and noted that the government sometimes failed to provide detainees "appropriate access to food, medicine, clothes and toilet and other basic facilities guaranteed by the law."

Election Preparations Underway

17. (U) The Election Commission announced on February 5 that campaign canvassing for the municipal polls would end at midnight. The reminder came as both independent candidates and those associated with fringe parties had largely avoided door-to-door canvassing due to fears of Maoist violence. The Election Commission stated that voting was to take place for "over 600 seats" on February 8, which the government has declared a national holiday. While 4,146 seats were open, the remaining seats were either vacant or candidates were elected unopposed; moreover some elected unopposed have since tendered their resignation. The Election Commission has not provided the number of seats that will remain vacant. Newspapers reported that additional candidates had withdrawn, but the Election Commission announced that votes cast for candidates who had announced their withdrawal after the deadline "would be considered valid and a certificate of election would be provided to candidates on that basis." The government rejected a February 2 appeal by the United Nations not to use schools for polling. The UN had cautioned that polling stations in schools would hamper the educational environment and that threatened Maoist violence could harm children and school property. The Election Commission replied that, "the polling stations already set up in schools will remain there. The Election Commission is not going to remove them just because of such concerns."

Parties Are Silent While Personally Condemning Maoist Violence

18. (C) The major Parties declined to issue a statement condemning Maoist violence, explaining that the Maoist strike furthered the Parties' goal of disrupting the municipal elections. Arjun Narsingh K.C., Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress, told Emboff that while he "personally condemns" Maoist violence, the strike was the Maoists' way to make the municipal election unsuccessful. Thus, the party could not condemn the strike because they shared the same goal. He added that while the strike was too long, it was "successful" because the people and Parties were "against autocratic rule." Bal Bahadur K.C., Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress (Democratic), opined that the long Maoist strike was not good for the people, as they were "the ultimate sufferer." But he also noted that the Parties could not condemn the strike, as the main purpose of the strike was to make the election unsuccessful. Likewise, Jhalanath Khanal, Central Committee Member of the UML, told Emboff that

the objective of the strike was to make the municipal election unsuccessful. He noted that the upcoming election was "already unsuccessful," and opined that it was not necessary for Maoists to continue the strike and they should "rethink" it. He stated that his party did not accept violence, but argued that because the government was involved in attacking the Maoists, the rebels were "compelled" to react accordingly.

Comment

19. (C) The Maoists have so far been successful in deterring participation in municipal elections by creating fear. They will justifiably claim that it was their violence, and not the Parties boycott, which led to a disruption in the King's municipal election. The political party leaders appear blind to the risk that the Maoist victory in derailing the elections could further weaken the Parties and set a horrible precedent for future polls in Nepal. Their failure to condemn Maoist violence and assassination of candidates demonstrates the difficulty they will have disassociating themselves from the 12-point understanding with the Maoists. Until they do so, reconciliation between the legitimate political forces will be unlikely.

MORIARTY